

7. Is money ordinarily lent at the rate of 8 per cent?—Yes, up to a comparatively recent date that was the rate; but more recently the rate has been 7. I have lent money to a very large number of deferred-payment settlers to purchase the freehold at 7 per cent.

8. *Mr. Driver.*] Is it not the case that settlers can only get money at 7 per cent. on really good security?—I may mention that there were a very large number of deferred-payment settlers who purchased their holdings at auction under the scheme of relief granted by the Legislature two years ago. I may point out that there was a very considerable reduction made under that scheme in the prices they had originally bid for the land in one instance, the price being reduced from something like £17 per acre to, I think, £1 17s. 6d. per acre, and that they all had valuable improvements on their land in the special instance mentioned amounting to £1,800 in 200 acres.

9. *Mr. Pearson.*] Are there any cases where these settlers have sold their land?—I believe there are some few cases, but they have not come personally under any notice excepting in one instance.

10. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Are you aware that during the period the Crown Lands Sales Act was in force there were purchases made in some cases at prices over £3 per acre?—I quite believe that during that period in particular localities certain allotments would fetch more. I may, however, direct the attention of the Committee to the fifteenth clause of the petition, in which it is stated that blocks of land which had remained open for some time at £1 10s. per acre and had not been selected at that price, after that Act came into operation the settlers were compelled to pay £3 per acre for that very land.

11. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] Are you of opinion that if these sections had been put up at £1 10s. they would have been run up?—No; they were open for selection for some time at £1 10s. and were not taken up. There were only a few sections in these blocks afterwards selected at £3, and the price was shortly afterwards again lowered to £1 10s., a considerable area of the land still remaining open at £1 10s., and being unselected till now at that price.

12. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Have you any list of the number of deferred-payment settlers who have taken up land at £3 or £4 per acre?—The whole of that information is to be found in the Appendix to the Journals of the Legislative Council of last session, in which will be found a statement of the prices each deferred-payment settler has paid for his land, with the arrears to that date; and I was under the impression that the Government had ordered the information to be brought up to date. I have got no special list of the exact number. I simply appear in the matter from the personal interest I take in land settlement. The deferred-payment settlers asked me to convene and preside at a meeting, which I did. I have no special personal interest in the matter.

13. What do you consider a fair price for average land, such as that comprised in deferred-payment blocks these last three years?—I think a fair average price for cash in the interior of Otago is £1 per acre.

14. I only want a general estimate of the value of land capable of producing a crop of wheat and then a crop of oats?—I may mention that I, as agent, purchased 1,000 acres of land in the Maniototo Plains, which was all average farming land, and could grow crops of wheat and turnips for £1 5s. per acre net, only about a fortnight ago.

15. *Mr. Macandrew.*] From the Crown?—No; from a private individual.

16. *Mr. Hurst.*] What price did the original purchaser pay the Government for it?—He paid £1 per acre.

17. What was the value of the improvements he made?—He had a sheep-fence about half-way round the outside boundaries. I may mention another fact which may be of use to the Committee. Dr. Black has just sold his property at Pukerau. It is all good agricultural land, though ridgy, and is in the immediate vicinity of two railway stations; area, 2,600 acres, 1,400 acres of which are under cultivation, and the land all in good heart. He sold at £6 2s. per acre, and it is generally looked upon as a very good sale indeed.

18. *Mr. Pearson.*] Is it all arable?—Yes. As I have said, it is ridgy, but it is good land.

19. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] Independent of any special value, what do you consider is the value of land which would stand a crop of wheat and a crop of oats afterwards, with reasonable facilities of access?—I would say, in reply, that it depends entirely upon the position of the land as regards railways, &c.; but, taking the average of the best agricultural land in the hands of the Crown in Otago, I do not think it would sell for cash for more than £2 to £2 10s., and I question if it would fetch that, taking an average over a considerable quantity. I would say that £1 15s. per acre would be a more probable average for the best land.

20. *Mr. Pearson.*] Is that arable land?—Yes.

21. *The Chairman.*] You are aware that the High School Board has sold a quantity of land lately?—You mean at Wyndham? Yes.

22. Have you any idea what price it fetched?—No. With regard to the nineteenth section of the petition, it refers to a Bill drafted by myself, and which, in the opinion of the petitioners, provides a remedy for existing evils. I would like to say that there were several important questions which were present to my mind, and which I had to consider when I prepared that Bill. The first of these was the ballot *versus* the auction system. I hold the auction system to be radically bad when applied to land on deferred payments, and in the Bill I framed I suggested that the Board, subject to the control of the Government, should fix a fair value for the land, and, having fixed this, should adhere to it, and allow the applicants to ballot for the allotments. I thought if the ballot system were adopted, and my suggestion providing for a revaluation to be made in those cases where too high prices had been paid were entertained by the Legislature, that the change from auction to ballot would mark a time which would be appropriate for justifying a scheme of revaluation, inasmuch as settlers who had bought at auction in the past would manifestly have selected their lands under more unfavourable circumstances than those who would hereafter select at a fair value by ballot. Another suggestion which I made in my Bill, and which I think is thoroughly practicable, is that which I have called the "capitalization of the unpaid instalments," and which is contained in clauses 21 to 29 of my Bill. It is, I think, of great importance, and has, I believe, received the unanimous approval of the settlers in Otago, and I believe of the Press too, with possibly a single exception.